

# SECTION FIVE:

## Schools



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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

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Catawba County is served by three public school systems: the Catawba County system, the Hickory City system and the Newton-Conover system. Statewide, only twelve counties have more than one public school district. Only Catawba, Surry, Davidson, Halifax and Cleveland County have more than two districts. Since the 1960s, merger of the three Catawba County systems has been discussed and a number of studies have been conducted on the matter. Except for a recent study conducted in 1997, each of the previous studies have recommended merger of the three systems.

The 1997 study: A Fact Finding Study with Organizational Options was completed by Pro-Ed, Inc. in the Fall of 1997. The Catawba County Board of Commissioners authorized the Study for the purposes of gathering facts on the three systems. The Study was also to explore different organizational options that may be feasible in alleviating school over-crowdedness and reducing duplicated costs. The Study offered five organizational options: 1) combine the Catawba County/Newton Conover School System, 2) expand the Hickory School District, 3) create a Flagship (Magnet) District, 4) create a single unified school system, 5) increase shared services. The study was accepted by the Catawba County Board of Commissioners and each of the School Boards but no specific action was taken. Discussions with the three School Superintendents indicate that it is highly unlikely that any of the organizational options - other than perhaps "shared services" - will be explored further at this time. A copy of the executive summary to the Study is included at the end of this Section.

Perhaps the two most important considerations when exploring growth-related school issues are the capacity of current facilities and the number of students (now and in the future) who will use them. Additional factors that should be addressed include the age and location of the facilities and the ratios of students to things such as teachers, classroom space, etc.

The following information examines all three school systems although the Catawba County School system is by far the largest of the three and also, under the current organizational structure, is the only system with any significant growth potential. However, it should be noted that both the Hickory and Newton-Conover systems have several capital outlay needs that are addressed primarily by local bond referendums.

Since 1987, local bond authorizations have generated nearly \$35 million to Catawba County Schools, \$12 million to Hickory Schools and \$6.5 million to Newton-Conover Schools. In March 1997, Catawba County voters approved a \$50 million dollar bond package to provide, among other things, additional schools and renovations to existing schools.

### **School Facilities**

Catawba County Schools currently operates 13 elementary schools, four middle schools and five high schools. The Hickory System operates five elementary schools, three middle schools and two high schools. The Newton-Conover System operates four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school.

The current building capacity of all Catawba County facilities is 14,455 students. The current student enrollment (2<sup>nd</sup> day of 1998-99 school year) is 15,140. The system as a whole is 685 students over capacity (104.7% of capacity). The elementary schools are 695 students over capacity (108.6 of capacity). The middle schools are 103 over capacity (104.6% of capacity). The high schools are actually 113 students under capacity (97.2% of capacity).

Those schools that have glaring deficiencies include Balls Creek Elementary (144% of capacity), Catawba Middle (140%), Oxford Elementary (121%), Maiden Elementary (113%), and Fred T. Foard High (113%). Bunker Hill High is the only school in the County system operating below 90% capacity.

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**Table 5.1**  
**Elementary Schools - Capacity and Enrollment; Catawba County**  
**School System; 1994-98.**

|                | 1994-95<br>Enrollment | 1998-99<br>Enrollment | 1998 Building<br>Capacity | % Capacity | Enrollment<br>Change 1994-1998 |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| Balls Creek    | 808                   | 974                   | 675                       | 144.30%    | 20.54%                         |
| Banoak         | 347                   | 371                   | 350                       | 106.00%    | 6.92%                          |
| Blackburn      | 857                   | 620                   | 675                       | 91.85%     | -27.65%                        |
| Claremont      | 587                   | 635                   | 575                       | 110.43%    | 8.18%                          |
| Clyde Campbell | 586                   | 677                   | 675                       | 100.30%    | 15.53%                         |
| Maiden         | 623                   | 709                   | 625                       | 113.44%    | 13.80%                         |
| Mtn. View      | 813                   | 759                   | 775                       | 97.94%     | -6.64%                         |
| Oxford         | 783                   | 1,059                 | 875                       | 121.03%    | 35.25%                         |
| Sherrills Ford | 584                   | 752                   | 650                       | 115.69%    | 28.77%                         |
| St. Stephens   | 661                   | 757                   | 700                       | 108.14%    | 14.52%                         |
| Startown       | 726                   | 667                   | 725                       | 92.00%     | -8.13%                         |
| Sweetwater     | 226                   | 305                   | 280                       | 108.93%    | 34.96%                         |
| W.A. Murray    | 527                   | 490                   | 500                       | 98.00%     | -7.02%                         |
| Totals         | 8,128                 | 8,775                 | 8,080                     | 108.60%    | 7.96%                          |

Source: Catawba County School System, 1998.

**Table 5.2**  
**Middle Schools - Capacity and Enrollment; Catawba County School System; 1994-98.**

|             | 1994-95<br>Enrollment | 1998-99<br>Enrollment | Building<br>Capacity | % Capacity | Enrollment<br>Change 1994-1998 |
|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| Arndt       | 546                   | 598                   | 600                  | 99.67%     | 9.52%                          |
| Catawba     | 509                   | 528                   | 375                  | 140.80%    | 3.73%                          |
| C.H. Tuttle | 565                   | 592                   | 575                  | 102.96%    | 4.78%                          |
| Jacobs Fork | 568*                  | 635                   | 700                  | 90.71%     | 11.80%                         |
| Totals      | 2,188                 | 2,353                 | 2,250                | 104.58%    | 7.54%                          |

Source: Catawba County School System, 1998. *Note: 1995-96 figures used for Jacobs Fork Elementary.*

**Table 5.3**  
**High Schools - Capacity and Enrollment; Catawba County School System; 1994-98.**

|               | 1994-95<br>Enrollment | 1998-99<br>Enrollment | Building<br>Capacity | % Capacity | Enrollment<br>Change 1994-1998 |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| Bandys        | 719                   | 774                   | 750                  | 103.20%    | 7.65%                          |
| Bunker Hill   | 702                   | 687                   | 825                  | 83.27%     | -2.14%                         |
| Fred T. Foard | 881                   | 1,021                 | 900                  | 113.44%    | 15.89%                         |
| Maiden        | 477                   | 504                   | 525                  | 96.00%     | 5.66%                          |
| St. Stephens  | 968                   | 1,026                 | 1,125                | 91.20%     | 5.99%                          |
| Totals        | 3,747                 | 4,012                 | 4,125                | 97.26%     | 7.07%                          |

Source: Catawba County School System, 1998.

The Ten Year Schools Facility Plan adopted in 1995 addresses four primary goals: 1) the replacement of old, outdated buildings that now serve students at Balls Creek, Sweetwater, and St. Stephens Elementary Schools, 2) the construction of two new middle schools in the East and North, 3) major additions and renovations at all high schools, and 4) significant additions in computer networking, cabling, and other technology. The 1997 bond package will facilitate the construction of new middle schools in the Bunker Hill and Bandys communities; new elementary schools in the Balls Creek, St. Stephens and Oxford communities; and additions to Bunker Hill and St. Stephens high schools.

Although the Hickory Public School System and the Newton-Conover School System are not in as dire need of space as Catawba County, there are some deficiencies. Jenkins Elementary (105.4%) and Viewmont Elementary (108.9%) are both over capacity. Both of these figures are significant when considering that additional classrooms were added at Jenkins in 1990, and Viewmont Elementary was rebuilt in 1992. The Long Range Capital Construction Plan (10 year), which was adopted in January, 1996 set the following construction goals for the system: 1) renovations and additions to Hickory High, and renovations at the five elementary schools; 2) construct two new middle schools while converting College Park Middle to an elementary school; and 3) renovations at all remaining schools. Although two of the elementary schools are over capacity, the ten year construction plan does not specifically address their space needs.

**Table 5.4**  
**Elementary Schools - Capacity and Enrollment; Hickory City**  
**School System; 1994-1998**

|                         | <b>1994-1995<br/>Enrollment</b> | <b>1998-1999<br/>Enrollment</b> | <b>1998 Building<br/>Capacity</b> | <b>% Capacity</b> | <b>Enrollment<br/>Change 1994-<br/>1999</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Jenkins<br>Elementary   | 482                             | 506                             | 480                               | 105.4%            | 5%  |
| Longview<br>Elementary  | 421                             | 353                             | 384                               | 91.9%             | -16%  |
| Oakwood<br>Elementary   | 326                             | 294                             | 332                               | 88.6%             | 9.9%  |
| Southwest<br>Elementary | 460                             | 384                             | 448                               | 85.7%             | -16.5%                                      |
| Viewmont<br>Elementary  | 551                             | 599                             | 550                               | 108.9%            | 8.7%  |
| College Park<br>Middle  | 523                             | 511                             | 592                               | 86.3%             | -2%   |
| Grandview<br>Middle     | 426                             | 428                             | 468                               | 91.4%             | .5%   |
| Hickory High            | 1024                            | 1091                            | 1335                              | 81.7%             | 6.4%  |

Source: Hickory Public Schools

The Newton-Conover Public Schools as a whole are approaching capacity. However, only one school in the system, Shuford Elementary, is currently over capacity at 105.4%. The Newton-Conover system has also adopted a Ten Year Long Range Capital Construction Plan in 1996. The Plan targets four specific needs which are as follows: 1) addition of Band/Chorus Room at Newton-Conover Middle School, 2) renovations at all three elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school, 3) a computer network and cabling at four schools (Shuford Elementary, South Newton Elementary, Thornton Elementary, and Newton-Conover High), and 4) roof replacements at all schools. Although not expressly discussed in the Plan, Shuford did receive new classrooms in 1997 to help curb the overcrowding problem.

**Table 5.5**  
**School Capacity and Enrollment, Newton-Conover School System 1998-99.**

|                              | <b>1998-1999<br/>Enrollment</b> | <b>1998 Building<br/>Capacity</b> | <b>% Capacity</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Conover School               | 150                             | 160                               | 93.8%             |
| Shuford Elementary           | 490                             | 465                               | 105.4%            |
| South Newton Elementary      | 391                             | 409                               | 95.6%             |
| Thornton Elementary          | 388                             | 419                               | 92.6%             |
| Newton-Conover Middle School | 605                             | 680                               | 89.0%             |
| Newton-Conover High School   | 744                             | 825                               | 90.2%             |

Source: Newton-Conover Public Schools

In recent years, there has been some discussion among various groups questioning why the school systems, especially the County System, has built schools (mostly elementary) that, in a few years, are already over capacity. Discussions with school officials reveal that the common philosophy is that keeping elementary schools at a 500-700 student enrollment creates a better learning and social environment than schools of 1,000-1,200 students. It is doubtful many would disagree with this thinking. However, a continued approach such as this will need to be weighed with the fiscal constraints that come with it.

### **VisionQuest 2010 Applicability**

The County's Comprehensive Plan, VisionQuest 2010, did not specifically address issues related to schools. However, it is clear that school-related issues are of prime importance to the County and therefore these issues have been examined extensively and addressed as part of the Growth Strategies Report.